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Rusteloos en overal: Het leven van Albert Helman. Haarlem, the Netherlands: In de Knipscheer, 2016. 863 pp. (cloth € 45.00)

Having completed his groundbreaking *Geschiedenis van de Surinaamse literatuur* (History of Surinamese Literature) in 2003, Michiel van Kempen now offers a second landmark in the literary history of Suriname: a biography of Lodewijk (Lou) Alphonsus Maria Lichtveld (1903–96), better known under the alias Albert Helman. Unfortunately, little of Helman's legacy is available in languages other than Dutch. Had he written in English, French, or Spanish, he would be counted as one of the most prominent twentieth-century Caribbean intellectuals. Few people are aware that he was the first (in 1926) to introduce José Vasconcelos's *mestizaje* concept in Caribbean literature.

Van Kempen started his biographical study in 1989 and accomplished a veritable *tour de force* by capturing Helman's enormous versatility in only 863 pages. What might seem initially to be an exaggeration becomes justified when we take into account the fact that Lichtveld used 50 pseudonyms between the ages of 20 and 93, never pausing, and publishing no less than 130 books and hundreds of articles. As a true Renaissance man, he wrote on subjects as diverse as music, art, film, literature, linguistics, gastronomy, anthropology, politics, and his own Native American roots. His importance, however, goes beyond that of an *homme de lettres*. Helman was involved in the Spanish Civil War; he was a resistance hero during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands; he acted as a minister and diplomat in defense of Surinamese interests; he became *doctor honoris causa* at the University of Amsterdam; and he corresponded with leading intellectuals of his time, such as Béla Bartók, George Orwell, Frida Kahlo, and Yehudi Menuhin. Van Kempen's aptly chosen title, *Rusteloos en overal* (Restless and Everywhere), succeeds well in capturing Helman's eagerness to excel in a seemingly endless variety of fields. This elegantly written biography deserves praise for its thoroughness and its fine balance between accessibility and erudition. Van Kempen presents an honest portrayal of Helman and does not avoid touching on some of his less admirable sides. For example, Helman claimed that he wrote his famous denunciation of Dutch colonialism in *Zuid-Zuid-West* without ever having read Multatuli's *Max Havelaar*, but Van Kempen provides evidence that this is untrue and that also in other cases, Helman was less original than he claimed.

Helman's obsession with writing was his way of making sense out of what he labeled in his will as "the Absolute Aimlessness of all goals in life" (p. 637). This nihilistic tone shows how far Helman had distanced himself at the end of his life from the Catholic ideals of his youth. Much of what he wrote regarding

his struggle with faith and his later sympathies with socialism and anarchism is of little interest to contemporary readers. Perhaps the one criticism that could be made of Van Kempen's approach is that he dedicated too much attention to such works and thereby missed an opportunity to go deeper into the genesis of his major works, such as *Zuid-Zuid-West* (1926), *Mijn aap schreit* (1928), *De stille plantage* (1931), *De rancho der X mysteries* (1941), *De laaiende stilte* (1952), *De foltering van Eldorado* (1983), and *Hoofden van de Oayapok!* (1984).

Rather than extensive reports on Helman's family problems (who cares that his son had an affair?), one would also have wished to see a stronger focus on a topic of special importance to readers of this journal: Helman's opposition to Surinamese independence and his problematic relationship with the younger generation of Surinamese intellectuals. While we do find plenty of references to (legitimate) criticism that Helman's perspective on Suriname remained too strongly embedded in a Dutch colonial tradition, Van Kempen carefully counterbalanced such criticism with evidence that, in many cases, it was Helman who led the foundations on which this new generation was able to build. After all, Helman had been among the first to seriously study the Sranan language, Anansi stories, and maroon culture. Van Kempen does not hide his own sympathies in these discussions. An example is his comparison of Helman's *De foltering van Eldorado* with Anton de Kom's *Wij slaven van Suriname* and his characterization of the former as a book that is "five times larger than De Kom's book ... ten times better documented and one hundred times better written" (p. 601). Such passages show how Van Kempen, who is not unfamiliar with the type of criticism Helman endured, presents a very personal interpretation of Helman's life and work.

Van Kempen also plans to launch a Helman website in order to make his vast collection of archival materials available online. This form of recognition would have appealed to a cosmopolitan author like Helman and is bittersweet revenge for the fact that during his lifetime the Dutch literary establishment never granted the "rebellious Indian" a major literary award.

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